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THE GOD OF OUR PLEASURES

MARK GUY PEARSE

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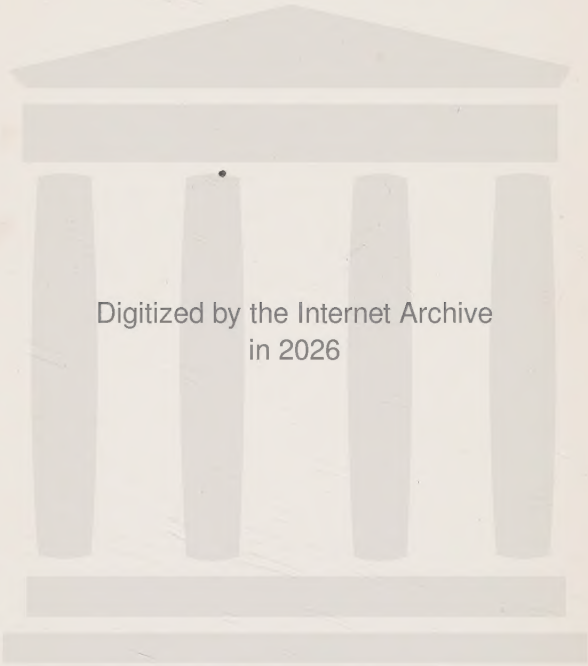
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THE GOD OF OUR PLEASURES

BY

MARK GUY PEARSE

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PREFACE

I WAS going into St. James's Hall one Sunday morning when a girl stepped up to me and said, "Please, sir, are you going to preach a *Country Sermon* this morning?" "A Country Sermon!" I said, "Well, I didn't know I ever preached Country Sermons." "Oh yes," she said, "I do like to hear a Country Sermon."

It suggested a new purpose in a sermon. It almost needs that a man should live in the city to enjoy the country. For us, shut in by streets, and dwelling amid the ceaseless rush and roar, there is a charm in the

great stretch of heaven and quiet beauty of the fields that others cannot know. So I resolved to make the sermon sometimes a Sunday excursion; the Holy Day not less holy for having the added suggestion of a holiday. I remembered how that the Blessed Master found in the country at once His favourite preaching-place and the constant store of His illustrations. Seated on the quiet mountain-side, arched with that deep blue sky, the wild flowers clustering about His feet, the grassy slope stretching down to the fishing village below, the waters of the lake dotted with the busy boats—this was His pulpit, this His sanctuary. About Him the wild birds sang; our own familiar birds gladdened and taught the company; the thrush and the blackbird sounded their rich notes, and now and then there came the hoarse croak of the raven from the rocky

height. And He ordained the flowers of the field and the fowls of the air as His appointed preachers. The bird in suit of black and brown, with monotonous chirp or rapturous song, or the raven dressed all in sombre black; and the flower—mere buttercup or daisy—*a flower of the field*—not a hot-house rarity set in a palace and tended with hourly care; a wild flower that trembled in the cold winds, and was nipped with frosts or trampled under foot—these were to tell of the Father's care. And it was the shepherd and the sower and the fisherman that gave Him the pictures with which He illustrates His teaching. For us too, as for them of old, He waits to reveal Himself in another form as we go into the country.

Such is the purpose of this little book, written in the hope that it may be a help to busy men and burdened women, who

rest on the stile for a few minutes, laying down the load and lifting up the eyes to sky and tree, plucking a flower, or listening to the songs of the happy birds, or looking out over the stretch of landscape, then on again towards the claims and calls that wait for them.

He is but a poor scholar who has not learnt to read in God's two books. The great pages of Nature are written within and without with blessed teaching; and though it may need a wise man to understand some of the harder chapters, yet there are sweet and simple lessons that a child can learn, and that might refresh an angel's spirit. And in the book of Nature, as in the Holy Word, there are four gospels — the gospel according to Spring, the gospel according to Summer, the gospel according to Autumn, the gospel according to Winter

—each proclaiming the goodness and wisdom and power of God, each recording His miracles, yet each with its distinct message. Let us listen to these voices of Nature that we may exercise ourselves in the art of *seeing God in everything*. For there is a tendency in us all to *localise God*. Under the baldest names and simplest forms there lurks the essence of High Churchism: the tendency to limit the Real Presence to churches, to services, to sacraments. The very purpose of all these is chiefly lost if they do not send us home to find God everywhere and in everything. We need to have wrought into us a living conviction that the *earth* is not ours—much less is it the devil's—"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof."

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THE GOD OF OUR PLEASURES

I

THE GOD OF OUR PLEASURES

"Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."
—PSALM xxxvi. 8.

THIS psalm carries upon it the image of the scenes amid which it was written. A true poet, with ear and heart open to the voices of Nature, David weaves its fair pictures into his songs. We can think of him hunted amidst the mountains by Saul, his soul at first uttering something of its wrongs,

driven forth by this mad king again and again as an outlaw with a price set upon his head.

Then comes the sweet healing of Nature, our mother and best nurse. The breath of summer blows about him, and soothes and quiets and refreshes him. The angry strain is silenced; the holy calm and hush about him brings a sense of God's presence, and he creeps, like a tired child, safe beneath the wings of God's loving-kindness. All Nature becomes a fair emblem of God: the great blue heaven that arches him and encompasses him is the measure of God's mercy; the great mountains, mighty, majestic, immovable, are the image of God's righteousness; the clouds, that screen the earth tenderly from the fierce heat, that gather the showers and pour themselves out in blessings upon the thirsty pastures, are the emblems of God's faithfulness; the great sea, the deep blue line that gleams

afar off, is the image of God's judgment; the river, a band of silver, embroidered with its flowered banks, is to him as the pleasures of God, so rich, so full, so fresh, leaping and singing from the hills. Such, we can think, is the origin and history of this psalm.

Let us think of this healing influence and sweet ministry of Nature.

We are like Peter's wife's mother—we are sick of a fever. The heat burns in our blood, and Nature would do for us, if we will, what Christ Jesus did for her, laying upon us the healing hand; speaking to us with a voice that rebukes the fever and brings a calm and restful pulse, restoring health to us, that like her of old, we may rise up and minister to all that are in the house. Pray God for the anointed eye, the opened ear, the attuned heart. Every Christian ought to be half a poet.

There waits for us in the fair earth what David found—forgetfulness of things that harass; a blessed freedom from those cares that eat into the finer tissues of the soul, that dull and dim the vision, and take away the tenderness of our nature and leave a wretched irritability. Amid such scenes it was that Jesus Christ taught His disciples the gracious lesson of trust in God. If we will yield ourselves to the influences with which God meets us in Nature, we may free ourselves from the cruel over-eagerness that makes us slaves grinding in our little mill, seeing nothing but the dust we raise, and hearing nothing but the rumble of the wheels. It is harder to take off the office coat than to loosen the soldier's helmet; harder to leave the ledger and cash-book than to lay aside the sword and spear; but because it is harder, it is all the more needful, and must be all the more resolutely done.

I will leave until another time the blessed teaching of the sky and clouds, the mountains and sea, that fourfold Gospel of God. To-day let us seek the key to this Paradise—"Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."

Listen to the words with which the psalm begins: "The transgression of the wicked hath said within his heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit; he hath left off to do good; he deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil." So the meditation begins with the horrible fact of sin. All the black list is there. *Transgression*—God rebelled against; God defied; God despised. There is *iniquity* and *deceit*—God robbed and man cheated. "*He hath left off to do good;*" that which was once done is

now left undone, a burden flung off in scorn. And there the Gospel that is any real Gospel always must begin. Nature is beautiful; Nature is blessed; Nature is healing. Nature is, as I have said, our mother and nurse, but neither mother nor nurse can undo the fact of sin. Nature cannot find us a Saviour. That deep and bitter cry of the heart, "I have sinned and come short of the glory of God," cannot be silenced by the sweet voices of the summer landscape. Rather do we feel, in the presence of these fair things, the blackness and foulness of sin. The beauty of the earth, its flowers, the songs of birds, do put us to shame.

Yet, what next? What shall we look for now? Does the black storm gather in the heavens? Do the wild winds howl and mutter as if searching out the rebel against God? Shall the fierce lightnings blaze—

"God's dagger plunging in the dark"—whilst the thunder of His voice is heard over all? Listen: "*Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. How precious is Thy loving-kindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house. Thou shalt make them to drink of the river of Thy pleasures.*" That is the Gospel, the blessed Gospel of God. It begins with us where we are, and it begins with us as we are. Yet it lifts us up to the highest and fullest and richest favours that God has to bestow. This is Paradise restored. The word that is here rendered "pleasures" is the same word as Eden, only that it is "Edens," as if we were to find so much more than we lost. Sin undid Eden; in place of the fair garden which God planted, there came the briars and

the thorns. But now is Paradise regained. Of old the man was thrust forth; of old at the gate stood an angel with a flaming sword that turned everywhere. For us that sword is quenched; for us that gate is reopened. In our midst is One who saith, "I am the door. By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and shall find pasture"—into the fair Paradise of God where flows the river of His pleasures. There is but one entrance: it is through Him who hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us. By faith in Him alone have we the boldness to enter. Here may we be bold indeed, since He saith, "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

And now accepting the great love of God to us in Jesus Christ, claiming it as our own, see what waits for us. Not forgive-

ness only: peace, goodness, gifts, gladness, grace, heaven — none of these must come first. First of all *Himself;* His own great love, the very source and fulness of the river of His pleasures. That ever must precede all else — Himself in all His love our own; we with all our wants made His. Do you remember in that story of the prodigal son, never failing in its illustration of God's love, there is one thing that lies at the back and spring of all the joy? Without that all would have been wanting; without that everything would have been undone. Think of the prodigal coming home, and when he was yet a great way off, his father sent one of the servants, saying, "Sir, my master, your father, has sent me to say that he forgives you." We see him stand sadly. "Oh, is that all?" and his heart sinks. Another servant comes: "Sir, my master,

your father, sees that you are in want, and he has sent you the best robe and the ring for the finger." Surely he waves them away, and bids the servants take them back. They do but mock the heavy heart within. And yet another servant comes, saying, "My master, your father, sees that you are perishing with hunger, and he has sent you the fatted calf." Poor lad! He cares nothing for them all. The servants said how gracious the master was, and wondered that he should do so much. The elder brother muttered angrily. What is lacking? Everything, because one thing is left out. "*When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him.*"

Now bring forth the best robe; now fetch the ring for the finger, and the shoes for the feet; now make ready the fatted

calf; now let him be satisfied with the fulness of his father's house, and drink of the river of his father's pleasures; now there is reason for the music and dancing, and they may well begin to be merry. That is ever first. Here is the spring of the river. "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! Therefore shall the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings."

As the entrance of the gate is alone in Jesus Christ the Saviour, so this Paradise is mine only when God is mine, when I can walk and talk with Him within its shade. Thus, and thus only, can I find the river of God's pleasures.

Let us learn, too, that if there be such abundant provision—the *river* of the pleasures of God—*then pleasure must be a necessity of the Christian life.* It is one of the best distinctions of this age that it

has begun to recognise that pleasure is not the luxury of the rich, but a necessity of all healthy human life. In the last century John Wesley was shocked because the boys at Kingswood played games. One of the most beautiful things marking the end of this century is "The Guild of Play," which Sister Grace has founded in order to teach the children of the slums and streets the quaint and pretty old English games. Some good people scarcely think of pleasure even as their privilege; but it is a great deal more than that, it is a command again and again, "Be glad." And again, "Rejoice in the Lord, and again I say, Rejoice." We are to serve the Lord *with gladness*, and the children of Zion are to be *joyful* in their King. God is never surely my salvation until He is my song. Pleasure is a necessity of our spiritual

nature. If you do not delight in the Lord, it can only be for want of knowing Him. You are looking the wrong way — in at yourself instead of up at your Saviour, or down at your circumstances instead of away to your Almighty Helper, or forth at your foes instead of only at your Father in heaven. To commune with God is to sing and to be strong. And surely this pleasure should be our bounden duty. If God hath provided so great a store, it is a sin and a shame to refuse it, or only lightly to avail ourselves of that which He is so glad to give.

Is not this the beautiful lesson of the summer?

Earth is abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house. It has drunk of the rivers of His pleasures. This is the feature of summer, this brimming satisfaction, this deep content, this fulness of fruitfulness.

Think if but a few short months ago one could have come upon the earth—the dreary stretch of barren fields, its trees black and leafless, the hedgerows a mass of tangled withered stalks, everything shut in by the leaden sky of winter, the wind moaning, with no voice of birds, no whisper of tenderness; day after day the sun, as if deserting the earth, growing shorter in its visits, and feebler in its shining. Shall we venture to tell the earth, "Fear not, fear not, thou shalt yet be abundantly satisfied." The shivering world swept by the east wind, or frozen by the breath of the north, or beaten by storms and pitiless rains from the west, might well sigh, "All these things are against me." But look at it now. Look at the fulness of beauty, that is a fulness of peace, such a deep rest of gladness, such a hush of satisfaction, broods over all.

Where has it come from? The earth has drunk of the river of God's pleasures, has taken the bountiful provision which He has sent it. The earth has turned to account every hour of the sunshine, every drop of soft rain. It has treasured and responded to the breath of every kindly wind. It has bravely endured the storms that beat upon it, and has set itself earnestly to repair the mischief that was wrought. And now, in all its fulness of fruitfulness, it rests satisfied.

And as we turn to ourselves, what waits for us? Is there to be no summer in the soul? Is it to be always black and dreary winter? Never any fruitfulness, never any deep content, never any achievement, never any fulfilment of our dreams, never any summer gladness? Are we to be mocked by the fair skies of summer; condemned

by the very clods, that seem to have heard the voice of God, and responded to His touch, and burst into beauty? Are we to be shamed by the very hedgerows? Look forth upon the beauty of it all, the beauty of hill and lake as it slumbers in the summer's calm; the fields whence they have carried the rich crops of grass; the stretches that daily grow golden as the corn is ripened by the sun. The peace, the brooding contentment, the rich abundance—are not these things all promises, prophecies, pledges of what our Heavenly Father waits to do for us? "If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" What then is the secret of the summer but this, that we open our heart to receive that which God would give us; that we respond to the presence of our God, listening to His voice, and walking

with Him? This is to find the Paradise within the heart, the Eden of the soul. It is by communion, true, living, heart-communion with our God, that we grow out of the winter barrenness and unrest into the deep peace and crowning fruitfulness of the summer. "In Thy *presence* is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

II

BY THE RIVER

"Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."
—PSALM xxxvi. 8.

SO then, God is the God of our pleasures. It is well for us thus to think of Him. And more than well—it is necessary. No man really knows God, no man thinks of Him rightly, until he thinks of God as the God of our pleasures. Pleasure is not meant to be the luxury of the rich; it is a necessity, a duty, a religion. Pleasure is needful to all healthy and true life. Therefore is it that God's love cannot rest in anything short of our pleasure. Heaven is at once

the fulness and completion of God's love, and the fulness and completion of our service. The great mistake we make is in supposing that heaven is a place instead of a condition. It is *now* and *here* if we will have it, not only up there and in the future. Put that, then, first—God is the God of our pleasures.

Many people have not learned thus to think of Him. He is to them the Terrible, the Majestic, the Judge seated upon His throne. But He who alone knoweth the Father has not taught us thus of Him. "What man of you, being a father, if his son ask bread, shall he give him a stone? and if he ask an egg, shall he give him a scorpion? and if he ask a fish, shall he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is

in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" The delight of the Heavenly Father is in the pleasure of His children. His love is not only a graciousness of pity that bends over us, not only a great benevolence that stoops to supply our wants. No father can be satisfied in giving to his children a bit of bread and a drop of water. That is what the gaoler gives the prisoner. Love delights in the pleasure of those whom it holds dear.

We might have expected that our sin and rebellion against Him should have withered and destroyed the pleasures with which God would make us glad. Not for such as we are should earth yield her flowers; not for us the skies in their splendour, and the stars that look down Heaven's kindliness. For the rebel what shall there be of luxuries and dainties? I think I have met with

people who are more righteous than the Almighty Father, and resent such a thing. If they could they would arrange the stars in alarming texts of Scripture; they would paint the flowers grey, and the grass brown, and the heavens black, and other colours should be banished, together with the laughter of children, and the song of glad hearts, and the merry-making of friends. For dying worms what room is there for pleasure? Well, do not let us be worms, since God has called us children. Do not let us be miserable, since God has bidden us be merry. And surely do not let us be afraid of pleasure, since He would make us drink of the *river of His pleasures*. There are still some few folks left who think that the evidence of true religion in the world is to be miserable, and their duty to other people is to make them miserable too. Ah, my

brother, if God can afford to send us men and women, sweet flowers and fair skies, and happy laughter, and glad music, do not you think that we can afford to make pleasure for somebody — for the children, for the sick folks, for the poor? Is it not a very token of our religion, a proof of our godliness? St. Paul tells us that we are to *please men unto edification*, which means that we cannot do anybody any good unless we mix some pleasure with it.

The river of Thy pleasures.

Let us get away to the river, and sit down by it under the shade of the trees. One of the best purposes of the holidays and one of our chief aims should be to store the chambers of the imagery with fair scenes. He is poor indeed and greatly to be pitied who has no picture gallery that he carries with him,

scenes fairer than any artist can paint—bits of God's own beauty hung up for ever in the mind. Sit here, then, in the shade, with the great blue stretch of heaven over us, the green grass for resting-place, and the flowers at our feet. Do you see that the river is *heaven made available for earth* —heaven come down to earth, put within its reach, and ministering to it? There are the great white clouds that go sailing above the world; the thirsty meadows cannot reach up to them, but, lo, they touch the mountains and pour out all their wealth, and the mountains store in their depths the beating rain, and send it down in a thousand rivulets and laughing waterfalls to join the brimming river. Follow it as it goes on its course of blessing, its banks overhung with ferns and bright with flowers. Think how it hurries on to turn the dripping mill-

wheel and to feed the hungry people. Do you remember how of old for the sleeping prophet there came an angel who baked him a cake and set at his head a cruse of water? So is it that heaven is ever coming down in the rivers of water to bless men. How generously it yields an unceasing store to meet the thousand needs of the people, enough and to spare, as it goes on its way to the city that itself makes great. We should have had no London if it had not been for the Thames, and no Liverpool if it had not been for the Mersey. The river yields a highway to the ships that go with their cargoes to the ends of the earth.

Come back again to our resting-place. The river is heaven made available for earth. Look how it gives itself to the tree that overhangs it—the tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf shall not

wither. See how a thousand creatures quench their thirst from it, and above it the happy birds sing as if it had brought them their joy.

And what is the river of the pleasures of God, but just this—God made available for us, God putting Himself most graciously within our reach? That is the meaning of everything that God has done in the world's history and is doing for us. There is in every developed religious life a three-fold stage. First, God is. Then God is with us in the person of His Son. Then God is nearer yet and closer still—He is *in* us. By a spiritual communion, by an inwrought sense of love, He becomes our very possession. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost given unto us; and the river is ever the emblem of the Holy Ghost. "My soul thirsteth for

God, for the living God," and in the river we drink of Himself as the pleasure and satisfaction of our life. This is what He is seeking to make us know by all the revelations of His Word and by all the way of our life — that He is within reach, is available for us. This is the great teaching of the Lord Jesus. God is not far off as we thought, in His high heaven, amidst His holy angels, but nigh at hand, wrapping us about with His goodness ; clothing us as He clothes the flowers ; ministering to us as He ministers to the birds, but with a tenderness infinitely deeper and more gracious than they can ever know. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God." What does that mean, but that the great God in heaven comes down to give Himself to me, and puts Himself within my reach ? I am to take

His hand, to know Him as my own; I am to find His almighty power available for my weakness, to find His infinite wisdom guiding my steps. He Himself is to be my Friend, with whom I am to walk and talk. My life is to find in Him its refuge, its strength, its peace, its joy. As the river gives itself for the satisfying and gladdening of the earth, so my life is to be cheered and brightened and gladdened and blest by His presence.

There it is — a thing *available*; not only to think about, not only to sigh for, but to drink of and live. The great love of God is really to minister to us and refresh us and satisfy us. This is what Jesus comes to bestow. "If thou knewest who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."

I have seen once or twice that strange sight the mirage, as clearly as one could see anything — the groups of living trees, the bright gleam of a lake, so exact that I should have maintained against everybody that it was a lake. Could I not see it with my own eyes? But suddenly it melted away into the barren nothingness. Image of the river of pleasures after which we pant and toil, but of which men never drink. There it is, but ever a little farther off. Just beyond the stretch of desert we will lie down and take our fill of its cool waters. But the stretch of desert sand goes on with us, and the lake is ever farther away. My brother, at our feet, within our reach, is this river of God's pleasures. Ours it is to know God as our Father in Jesus Christ; ours to live in the blessed consciousness of His presence and favour, to lie down at res.

in His care. Ours it is to drink and live.

And mark this word "*satisfied*," which applies to the river of God as well as to the provisions of His house. Only the river of God's pleasures can satisfy the whole nature. We are too great for any but our Creator Himself. There are deeper wants than any other can minister to, higher and greater needs than any other hand can satisfy. I was reading in the paper some time ago of the gold-fields that have been lately discovered in British Columbia. Here is an extract: "A miner from Klondyke who has returned to Montana tells of the great hardships experienced in the wild gold regions, and declares that in the course of three years he saw over two hundred graves. A large majority of the deaths had been caused

by starvation. He admits, however, that gold abounds in the district." Was ever so grim a picture? There in the tent lies the gaunt skeleton, and tight in his bony grip the yellow gold, the hard and shining gold of which he had dreamed and for which he had toiled, and having which he said he would have all and be in need of nothing. And lo! he held the treasure in his grasp, and sank and died for want of a crust of bread. There is a terrible price paid for the possession of many a thing that a man counts good — a higher price than even the miner paid for his gold. Truth, goodness, love, purity, honour, these are dead, dead whilst the man grasps the treasure that he coveted. How good to turn from such a scene to these words, "Thou wilt make them to drink of the river of Thy pleasures"—the river of the

water of life which ministers to all within us, and brings a perfect satisfaction. They told of old of a water by which the bitter memories were lost. But he who drinks of this river holds the joy of a past forgiven, blotted out, remembered against him no more for ever, cast into the depths of the sea, as if the waters of the river bare it on and on, away, away, until it sinks buried beneath the great billows of the ocean. Of old they sang of a river in which youth was renewed. But they who drink of this river have a life that is everlasting, ever new, ever young, ever fresh, ever glad, a river that bears us on and home to the fair city of God. Pleasure is ever a smaller thing than satisfaction, until we find our home in God. Then it is satisfaction brimming over into pleasure. Is it not worth while for us to be still for a moment or

two in the fever and fret of the world, and to ask ourselves, "What, after all, do I need? What is that which, if I lack, I yet lack all?" Well, I want a peace, assured, authoritative, spoken into my innermost heart, that only God can give. I want a new life, full, true, good—something that can touch the deepest springs of my nature, and sweeten all that is bitter, and purify all that is evil, and keep me ever at my highest and best. I want the grasp of a hand that will never let my own go. I want a home and refuge that can never fail me in the uncertainties of life, and in the certainties of death and eternity. How can they be mine? Here is the answer: "Thou shalt make them to drink of the river of Thy pleasures." Not to think about it only, not to hear about it only, not to long for it only, but to *drink*. I must avail myself

of that which is made so available; I must take that which is so freely given. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

III

ON THE MOUNTAINS

"Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures."
—PSALM xxxvi. 8.

ONCE again we must think of David pursued by the king, driven by the mad Saul into the loneliness of the mountains, and pursued thither, a price set upon his head. Once again we may well notice and feel the healing ministry of Nature that comes to him—the blessed uplifting of soul, as if he got away from the things that afflicted and chafed him ; as if, in that ampler, purer air, he lost the cares of earth, and felt the blessed loosening of fear and worry.

Look forth upon the scene that lies about him—the great stretch of blue heaven arching and rimming it all; the clouds that drift across the sky; the mountains, mighty, majestic; the blue sea rounding it off with the infinite; the stretch of plain between the mountain and the river and between the river and the sea, where the cattle feed and the bountiful provision is made for man and beast. Looking over it all, David sings, "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, Thy judgments are a great deep. O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast."

But that is not all. There is a contrast very sharp between all this boundlessness, the vast and infinite tokens of God's presence, and that which follows it, and which

suggests another incident in the life of David, a frequent and familiar one. He is going with a little company of devoted followers up between the mountain heights, probably at dawn, and the mists that wind about the hills may have hidden him from the watchful enemies. Along by some steep path where only the hardy and skilful mountaineers could climb, along by narrow ledges, they have gained the cave that is their stronghold, and at the mouth of it David rests. He loosens the helmet and coat of mail, and lays down his spear. Here he is safe from every foe; here no fear can come. He leans to drink of the cool spring that bubbles up from the limestone rock. And then in the delicious shade, at rest in this blessed safety, he lies all compassed about with sweet security and sings, "How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children

of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings." Now, it is all this which waits for us, all this which we need to see, the infinitely great and yet the infinitely near—the boundlessness of God, yet the approachableness, the personal presence, the tenderness of His pity, the refuge we have in the shadow of His wings.

"Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens." It is the measure of vastness, of height and depth and length and breadth that passeth knowledge. Look up into the blue arch of heaven and think how it doth compass the world. This great world of ours, with its mountains and seas, with its busy cities and its vast continents, yet do they lie in the hollow of the heavens. It enfolds the world. You cannot get outside it. Of old they tried to build a tower up to heaven, but build as high as they would,

heaven was ever yet beyond them. We cannot get away from heaven. We leave the land ; the cliffs sink down out of sight, the green fields are lost, the blue hills die away in the haze, but there is the great arch of heaven, unbroken, circling—as if to lose the earth were only to gain more of heaven. Again, you leave the sea, and pass through the country, and reach once more the busy city. You have left behind the fair scenes of mountain, the stretch of ocean, the river winding through the meadow, but you have not lost the heavens. Up from the narrow streets, up between the crowded houses, you look, and lo ! this great arch is above you. It is the fair picture of that mercy which shuts us in, which enfolds us, and holds us for ever and ever. We can never get outside that love, never get beyond it. No change

leaves it behind, no place can rob us of its presence. If mine were all the sins of all the world, yet is there one thing greater than a world of sin: it is that infinite love of God—"*Thy mercy is in the heavens.*"

The king might drive David from place to place. The court was full of peril. His father's house was unsafe. There was none to whom he could turn. But lo! the heaven was opened, and the higher he rose into it the safer he was. His refuge, his safety, his joy was there.

And David noticed, too, how that from the heaven there came all the energy and blessedness of earth. There was the great sun itself, incalculably vast, and yet how much greater the heavens, in which the sun had its tabernacle—the gilded tent pitched but in a corner of the blue expanse, whence comes the sun, robed as a bridegroom

cometh forth from his chamber. Thence come the clouds that water the earth and fill it with riches. Every breath of wind that fanned his cheek, every ray of light that shone upon him, all that gladdened and blessed the world, came from that high heaven. So was God's mercy the great, deep, exhaustless source of every good. "Thy mercy is in the heavens." A thing so free, so boundless, so beneficent.

Then comes the next strain of his song: "*Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.*" It is a strange metaphor. The rocks, the mountains, the round world, that which is fixed, steadfast, sure, might be the emblems of His faithfulness; but why this, "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the *clouds*" — the things which are never at one stay — that gather and break in the shower, or

rise and melt away in the sunshine? The vapour, the morning cloud — is it not the emblem of the utterly inconstant? Well, it may be that there is another reference in the mind of David. Sitting within his refuge, he watches the clouds gather; the blackness blots out the sun, the storm breaks in lightnings, the thunder booms and echoes in the hollows of the hills, the floods hiss and roar in their rage. But lo! the tempest is over, and as once more the sun creeps forth, turning the falling drops to glistening pearls, across the black clouds stretches the rainbow, vivid in its colour, perfect in its arch. It is the seal of God's covenant, the bond and pledge of God's mercy. "Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds." It is as when the bride stands decked in her beauty, under the great dome and amid the stately aisles

of the cathedral, and the organ and choir lead the people in their hymn of gladness; yet all the scattered favours and the thousand tokens of love are centred in the simple wedding-ring, the token and pledge of the bridegroom's faithfulness. So are the glory of the heavens and the beauty of the earth made one, bound and held by that token of God's faithfulness — the rainbow. So we have mercy and faithfulness, love and truth. Here was that which made the mercy a pillar. Mercy is as the heavens, but faithfulness turns it to the solid and abiding and assured. The uncertain Saul was one moment all smiles and favours, and then, swift as a thought, came that evil spirit upon him, and the spear crashed at the harper's head, and the singer was silenced suddenly, and fled for life. And as David rested in the still-

ness of the mountains, and looked forth upon the blue heavens and the white clouds, he felt that here was no caprice, no passing whim of favour; here was no change, no variableness. No shadow of turning was there in this faithful love. "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." There they stood for ever and ever, the summits in the clouds, the depths rooted in the round world, stretching down into the hidden fabric of the earth, underlying the sea, the emblem of the unchanging.

"Thy judgments are a great deep;" that is, the ways of God, the dealings of God with men, the expression of His feeling towards us and the utterance of His thought concerning us, these are His judgments. They are as the sea that lies fretting at the base of the cliff whence the mountain towers up to heaven.

And see yet further, all this mercy and faithfulness and righteousness and judgment are for the good of God's creatures. "Thou preservest man and beast." All these come down—down from the height comes the light and the air and the shower. The mercy of God bends over the pasture; the faithfulness of God concerns itself about the myriad things that He has made. The faithful Creator cannot desert the work of His hands. He cannot fashion and then fling off that which depends upon its Creator. "Thou preservest man and beast." Afar off David sees the pasture dotted with cattle. There are the plains where the shepherd leads his flock. Here about him on the mountain heights the deer has its home, and the eagle soars on high.

Now, so much is needed by us. These lofty things, infinite and boundless, are

meant to stretch our souls, to uplift us and to ennoble us, to minister to the qualities of reverence and awe. It is needful for us to be impressed by the sense of God's greatness; to be hushed and awed, adoring before the Majesty of the Most High. There is need, much need, for our life to lose its littleness. The soul must come out of its cage, no longer prisoned within the bars; it must soar into the heavens, singing as it soars, until, like the lark, it is lost in the light.

But that cannot be all. We want more than the vast and boundless, the infinite. We are apt to be lost in the greatness. We want the Infinite contracted to a blessed Presence. The children of men must know God as their Father, One to whom they can come and tell all their heart, and feel those arms about the neck, that kiss upon

the cheek, that great, deep love wrapping us around with tenderness, and saying to each, "*This, My son.*" The vague and the infinite awe us and repel. There is nothing in the great stretch of blue sky or in the solemn glory of the mountains that can teach us to call God our Father.

That is ours in Jesus Christ, God made man, Immanuel, God with us. We want a love that can meet us not only in the vastness of the heavens, but away down in the secret places of our own soul, in the loneliness of the hidden depths within us. The faithfulness of the Creator is seen not only in preserving that which He has created, but in ministering to its deepest needs, and in developing to its fullest and best the life that He has given. Herein behold the love and the faithfulness of our God, that He is made one with us to up-

lift our life from its littleness, that He ennobles and enriches all the common round and common relationship of our life by Himself accepting its conditions.

And that faithful love must declare itself in a manifestation such as the mountains cannot set forth — infinitely nearer, infinitely more. We have sinned, and what can faithfulness and love do with sin? There, in the cross of Jesus Christ, is the dread penalty of our sin. "God hath declared His righteousness for the forgiveness of sin, that He might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth."

The vastness of heaven, and the greatness of the mountains, and the glory of the seas—these surely are the fitting emblems of the Almighty. But how great, how wonderful, how gracious is that tenderness which breaks the bread, saying,

"Take, eat: this is My Body, which is given for you"—that holds forth the sacred cup and saith, "This is My Blood in the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins." It is as if He would put Himself within the little compass of my grasp, as if He would give Himself to me that I may feed upon Him in my heart with thanksgiving. Claiming all the great love of God to us in Christ Jesus, let us hide ourselves under the shadow of His wings. "*He shall cover thee with His feathers.*" So would our gracious God wrap us about with His love; He would have us not only in safety, but in such snugness and cosiness of shelter under His feathers, where we can feel the pulsing of His love towards us, compassed with His favour as with a shield.

IV

GOD'S SUNSHINE

"The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory."—PSALM lxxxiv. 11.

HERE is a Koh-i-Noor—nay, more than that, a world of light. Say it to yourself, "*The Lord God is a sun and shield; He will give grace and glory.*" Sing it to yourself as you walk along your way amidst the beauty and gladness of the spring-time. Live in it, and grow in it, as the trees and flowers and birds live in the sunlight.

In all the material world the fittest emblem of God is the sun—the vastness of it, the glory of it, the beneficence of it. Hidden

by its very glory! So far off, yet finding out our distant world and bathing it in its genial warmth, breathing about it a new hope. So mighty, yet so gentle. Stooping not only to the lowest and least forms of life, but ministering to its hidden and shapeless beginnings.

The other day I stood watching the sea —the great sea stretching away for thousands of miles. I thought of its vastness, washing the shores of distant nations. I saw its billows come sweeping, arched and majestic, breaking in thunder; and I thought of its might; and I thought of its depth, going down, down into the gloom. And then I turned from the sea to the sun, and in an instant all that shrank to a littleness indeed. Greatness! Why, the sun took up the round world and encompassed it as a mother wraps her little one about with warmth. Nay,

this ocean of light held a million worlds, and the round earth itself became but as a pebble on which its waves fell. Vastness! I thought of the incalculable spaces through which its energy was felt and its beneficence was poured. Might! What was the sea? The sun touched it and turned it into vapour that floated in the heavens, and if the sun should withdraw its bounty the very sea itself would become the solid icefields of an Arctic winter. And yet whilst the waves of the sea broke with incessant thunder, the sunlight fell upon me with such gentleness that it seemed all pity and tenderness —softer and more silent than the south wind that rustled in the young leaves of the trees.

Let us dwell for a minute or two upon this vastness of the great sun pouring forth the light in every direction through all the

spaces of the universe, filling them perpetually. It has no night, no rest. We set, not the sûn; we rise, not the sun. Upon it all the worlds hang, held in their places by its energy, kept alive and made beautiful by its light and warmth. It rules the universe by shining. Think how for millions of years its fulness has been unchecked, unwearied, and to-day it shines as freely for us as for our father Adam when he walked in Paradise itself. Through measureless ages, through measureless spaces, it has poured its streams of light, immense, infinite, everywhere, in everything.

The Lord will give grace.

Greater than the sun itself, more exhaustless in its fulness, mightier in generous bounty, is the source whence comes grace. He will give grace. Think that from God there comes

streaming for us men and women, goodness, truth, purity, brave trust, patience, love, just as the light comes streaming from the sun. He will give grace. The light shines for me, as fresh and beautiful as at the dawn of earth's day. I like to think of it ripening the corn which Adam sowed, and gladdening the earth when Ruth gleaned on the plains of Bethlehem, and shining on the blessed Lord as He walked with His disciples long ago, just as it shines upon us to-day. *He will give grace.* All that good and holy men of old have found is here for you and me. All that the great servants and saints of God enjoyed is ours as fully and freely as it was theirs ; all that enabled them to triumph, all that availed to make them holy, all that strengthened weak followers into more than conquerors, and made timid men and women very heroes for Christ,

is ours to-day. *He will give grace. Give it.* I have spoken of the freeness of the light. Free, blessedly free! As I was thinking upon this subject, I lifted my eyes, and there, over the mantelpiece, was the notice of my gas rate. But for the sunshine there comes no bill. Everything else has been claimed by greedy man, but he cannot claim the sunshine. Do you remember the story of Diogenes, that grim old philosopher, how that when Alexander the Great stood in all the consciousness of his power, and asked the philosopher what he should do for him, Diogenes said, "Well, will your Majesty get out of the light?" He who has got the sunshine has got more than any man can give. Let us exult in it. "*He will give, give, give grace.*"

What a generous giving is this of the sun! It does not matter to the sun how

many years have passed; it does not get tired of shining. How short-lived we are! and our changes are perpetual. The sun saw the first man come in; has seen the proud empires rise and crumble into dust; but it shines for us as if in very pity. It is not dismayed, though the light has revealed a thousand hideous sights—the murdered man, the woman worse than murdered, the wronged little one, the beaten slave. Yet, unwearied it shines.

He will give grace. Think you that He who bids the sun to shine, who sets it in the heavens as the symbol of His own power and goodness, is less generous—that His grace is less full and free than His light? "Ah me!" we well may say, "within me, my God, what evil things do find a home. Foul, selfish, proud and yet afraid, what little use of life's opportunities, what waste

tracts of desert and wilderness, what failures! I am far away, so weak, so little—what hope is there for me?"

Soul, look up, look up. *He will give grace.* The sun is not so ready to shine upon the earth as thy God to forgive the past, to help in every weakness, to restore the beauty and joy and blessedness of life.

We have looked upward at the sun, now let us look downward to the earth. The sun so vast, so glorious—yet think of its *individual ministry, its separate service.*

What is the glory of the sun? Well, I am not sure that it is its power, its greatness, its energy. I think, after all, it is the way in which it finds things out one by one, and just gives itself away to them. That is its glory. I have watched the sun rising amidst the mountains, crowning them with

gold and robing them with purple, until they stood like lords-in-waiting arrayed for the coming of their king, and it has seemed in keeping with the sun's greatness. But little by little it rose higher, and now it covered the fir-trees with glory, and now it lit up the moss of the rock. Still higher rose the sun, and then it reached the meadows, and every tiny grass blade caught its warmth and energy, and every flower had its golden cup filled to the brim. And lower still it went down, to the seeds that were buried in darkness, and whispered to them of hope, and put new strength into them. Think if I could tell the tiny flower how far off the sun is, how many myriads of miles away, how great it is, how splendid in its majesty, "Surely," the flower would say, "it can never stoop to me, or find me out, or care for me, or minister to

my want!" Ah, but it does, it does; it gives itself to the flower with such tenderness and thoroughness as if there were not another in the round world. *He will give grace.*

Surely this is the glory of our God. We think of Him in the greatness of His power. We sing of Him, "Who is like unto Thee—glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" But is not this His glory, that He comes to us away by ourselves, one by one, and gives Himself to us separately, stooping to the lowest, reaching to the farthest off, finding out the most hidden. The sun is not going to put to shame the ingenuity of our Father's love.

There is not a grass blade in the land but can stand up and say, "The great sun shines for me—my helper and my friend." So let us, every one of us, say likewise of

God: "I will say of the Lord, He is my God. I know I am little, but because I am so little He will stoop lower. I know I am weak, but because I am weak He will take all the more care of me. I know I have many hindrances, but God can do as much for me as for others. I will trust, and not be afraid. He will give grace."

But here the comparison ends, and there comes the contrast. All the sunlight of all time cannot bless a man who is blind. The suns of all the seasons can avail nothing for the dead. There must be the faculty to receive the light and to respond to it. The sun cannot give life, it can only develop it. It cannot transform the nature. But He who is the Light of the World is also the Lord and Giver of life. See Him by whom do come to us grace and truth. See Him bend over the couch of

the dead maiden, and, taking her by the hand, He saith, "Maiden, arise." See Him as He lays those fingers on the blind man's eyes and saith, "*Be opened.*" In Him the blessed grace of forgiveness is ours. His coming is in relation to our sins—His very name is Jesus, for that He shall save His people from their sins. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." He gives to us a new nature whose instinct it is to know God and to serve Him. He will give grace. And that grace we have to receive, and avail ourselves of it. The golden sun shall in vain pour its beauty where the plough has not turned the furrow and the seed-corn has not been flung. Man's work it is to avail himself of the sun and to adapt himself to its times and seasons. And even so is it with God's

grace. It cannot avail him anything who does not receive it and respond to it. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become children of God."

And this is not all. He will give grace *and glory*. Grace is glory begun; glory is grace completed. The work of the sun is not only a constant ministry—it is a ministry towards an end and finish. The stems are for buds, and the buds are for blossoms, and the blossoms are for fruit. That is the glory which crowns and completes the grace. The seed down in the earth is quickened and strengthened and developed, thrusting down root and pushing up stem; but it is not then forsaken. Day after day it is watched until the ripened corn is ready for the sickle and there is the shout of harvest home. He will give grace—that is good and blessed—grace to help in every

time of need, grace to be true, and grace to be brave, and grace to endure, and grace to grow, and grace to love. But that is not all. He will give grace *and glory*. Let the heart sing of it. It seems a long way off from the seed in the ground, buried in the earth, prisoned by the frost—it is a long way from that to the harvest home of August ; but it comes. The sun abideth faithful, growing more and more as it is needed, until glory crowns what grace begun. God hath a delight in His handiwork. The lowest creature bears the marks of His goodness, but in nothing hath He such joy as in the work of grace. He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy. *He will*—it is assured, positive, firm as the round world beneath His feet—*He will give grace and glory ; no good thing will He withhold from*

them that walk uprightly. Let us go forth with a glad courage, let us march to the strains of this sweet song. Let the very beginner be glad; let the most tempted sing; let the timid be made brave in this great assurance. "The Lord God is a sun and shield; He will give grace and glory."

V

AMONGST THE TREES OF THE WOOD

"He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water."—PSALM i. 3.

LET us pray God for the anointed eye and opened ear as we go forth to-day among the trees of the wood. How beautiful it is in the spring-time of the year to get into the forest; to sit where the sunshine creeps through the leaves, and falls in golden patches on the mossy trunks; to look up between the dainty green into the tenderness of the blue sky, which seems at this season of the year to have in it a tremulous and even tearful pity for all the young life that

has come into being! How sweet it is to be still and listen to the music of the birds; the sturdy thrush never wearies of its ringing notes, and the piping of the blackbird is a fit accompaniment. The song of linnets sounds from every tree, and over all there broods the cooing of the dove. Then all is forgotten as the soul gathers at the ear to drink in the song of the nightingale. It is a touch of truest poetry that sings of heaven, "There everlasting spring abides!" The trees are not only decked in richest leafiness, but many of them are arrayed in the beauty of their bloom—the chestnuts lift their stately candelabra of white or red, the hawthorn blushes in its dainty dress, and the bloom of the fruit-trees fills the orchard. Look at it all, and note that the beauty and the charm of the trees is in their *variety*. We must have the sturdy oak, the rounded beech,

the more broken ash, the silver birch that sways with every breeze, the aspen quivering, the yew-tree looking almost black against the lighter shades, the dark-crowned fir-tree, and amidst the "woods overhanging woods" there rise the stately poplars. It is the variety that makes the charm. What a dreadful thing to have a world of poplars! How amidst its right angles and regiments one longs for a crooked thorn-bush to break it up. Well, that is the first point for us to notice.

The blessed man shall be like *a* tree—if you like you may render it *any* tree—that is planted by the river of waters. *Its blessedness does not depend upon its kind.* It is not the cedar of Lebanon of which David was thinking here—the mighty giant whose age may be counted by centuries, of vast girth and far-spreading branches. *Any tree.* It is

not the tree, but the planting and the place, that constitute the blessedness. So, then, do not let us think that we are the wrong sort. I have seen, in old-fashioned gardens, trees that have been cut and hacked and twisted into all sorts of fantastic shapes: peacocks and pagodas, and I know not what else. Alas for the trees that think they must be turned into peacocks before they can prosper! There are two kinds of religious people in the world; there are those who always want to be somebody else, and there are those who want everybody else to be exactly like themselves. Now, the woods need all the kinds of trees that God has made; and the world wants all the kinds of people that God has sent into it. Some people are, perhaps, very different from what God made them, but He wants us to be every one after his kind. As I walked through the

woods the other day, I thought within myself how it would spoil everything if there sprang up a quarrel as to which was the *right* kind of tree. If the poplar contended proudly that everybody should stand upright, and make the most of himself; and the birch said it was a sign of grace to bend one's self on the earth, and told the poplar not to be so stiff! If the hawthorn sneered at the holly because it had its winter suit still; and the holly put up all its prickles and said, if it remembered rightly, the hawthorn had no winter suit to boast of. No, no; they mingle together, and each lends the other a new beauty, and the variety is the charm and play of the whole. The Heavenly Father made them all, and ministers to them all, and has a purpose for them all.

We can none of us afford to make too much of ourselves; *but we can all of us*

afford to be ourselves. I am not much at the best, but I am best when I am myself. Now, timid soul, the Heavenly Father has room for you. Is it not something—is it not a great deal—that you, who think yourself not good enough to be amongst the people that love and serve God, should have the first place in my message to-day? Just as in the farmyards the weak creatures that cannot push and scramble like the rest are fed by themselves, and are not overlooked, I can think that the gracious Lord sends a separate bit for you, and I am sure it is of His daintiest. Listen then, tired soul, and take it to yourself. You have been looking at yourself, and you are full of sorrow and fear, and you do not see how you can ever hope to come amongst the trees of the Lord. You look at the poplar, up so near heaven, and you think you can never, never

get up so high as that; and you look at the silver birch, and you are sure you can never grow so beautiful; and you look at the chestnut, and you despair. A tree, indeed! No, you are but a stick, without root or branch, without bud or bloom! *Yes, and all the Lord's trees were like that to begin with.* The trees of the Lord do not come into the world ready-made—they grow. The thing that is least like a garden is a "nursery." "What are these?" I have asked; "these things stuck in the ground, withered, melancholy, useless—will they ever come to anything?" "Indeed they will," says the nurseryman; "why, they are plum-trees and pears—and these are forest-trees." Forest-trees! and they were mere twigs without a leaf to show what their name was. I was looking the other day at a tree that stood tall and flourishing, a perfect

picture, and my friend told me that he had stuck a piece of stick in the ground and looked after it, "and now," he said, "it has come to that." That is what the Heavenly Husbandman is always doing, picking up the stick and planting it, and it comes to that. The tree planted by the river was nothing to begin with.

Then notice further, and carefully, that *the tree is planted.* It did not plant itself. It surrendered itself wholly and utterly to the husbandman. He took it in hand and dealt with it, and that was the beginning of its prosperity. This utter and whole-hearted surrender of ourselves is the first step in the blessed life. The Husbandman must have possession before he can do any planting. Let us see this very plainly. The difference between those who are the Lord's and those who are not, is not that some are born

religious; it is not that some have been brought up in the midst of religious influences; it is not that some people believe certain theories and creeds, and others either do not understand them or do not think about them. It is not a matter of understanding. The religious life is a matter of *will*, of *choice*, of *surrender* to God. On our part this is everything; surrender and submission to the Lord. How many weary souls, torn and distracted about notions and names, forms and creeds, might end their troubles to-day if they would but believe this! I have not to make myself right that He may bless me; I have to give myself to Him that He may do everything for me. How soon should the sad heart find rest, if it would give over itself, and everything else, to the Lord! "My Lord, I can do but one thing. I can but give myself, just as

I am, to Thee." "Soul," saith He, "that is all I desire, and all I ask."

Then possessing, He plants it.

Without unduly pushing the figure, I think we may find it full of instruction. The husbandman dug for it a grave, dug down in the mould and stones, and then put it into the earth, and heaped the mould about it. And the whirling dust and chaff laughed at the tree, and said: "Why, you are parting with all your liberty: fixed and fastened in like that, you might as well be in prison. You will never be able to please yourself, never able to go where you like. It is dreadful." And the chaff flew up to heaven on the breeze, and then came fluttering down, and was trodden under foot. Buried, prisoned, dungeoned? Well, yes, if you like to call it so. *Buried that it may live.* Put into the earth that it

may get up to heaven. Rooted and grounded that it may be free to bear much fruit. These are blessed contradictions. "As many as received Him—received Him as Lord and Master, and submitted to His authority—to them gave He authority to become the sons of God."

Then, planted, the tree begins to put forth at the one end the roots that do go out and grasp the rocks, taking hold of the firm earth, holding to the great underlying ribs of the world. And at the other end the branches spread and the leaves unfold, and it drinks in the sunshine and the rain of heaven. It is the fair emblem of the man of God, rooted in obedience, rising to communion. The roots are fixed and twisted round the rock, they know no shifting, no change. There is the man of God: the law of God is an authority supreme, that knows

no argument, no exception, no choice. I *must*, and I *will*, grip the law of God. Here is stability. You know where to have that man. You can come and go, and you always find him there—rooted in obedience, grounded in the law of God. Right is might with him. But a tree is not all root. Laughing in the sunshine, sporting in the breeze, dripping with the shower, is the branch that pushes out over earth and up into heaven. The emblem of freedom. But the branch is always in proportion to the root. The obedience and the communion do keep pace.

And note, further, it is not only a tree planted, but a tree planted by the *rivers of water*. There is not only the rock to hold on to, but there is the river to refresh it. Rock and river, river and rock, this is what the law of God becomes. They who do not know think the law of God is hard and

stern as the voice of thunder, with its *Thou shalt*. But they who do know cry, "Great peace have they that keep Thy law." It is rivers of water, sweet, refreshing, quickening. We think of the law as a command, but we come to find it a promise. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." The word awes me, frightens me, withers me. But lo! as the Blessed Lord comes on His way He speaks: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is not a command, but a promise, a pledge, and the very word brings the fulfilment.

So rooted in obedience and stretching up into communion, the blessed man becomes like a tree; there is stability and steadfastness. He knows Whom he has believed, and is persuaded that that will hold, though the winds may blow and the rain beat. He bringeth forth his fruit in his season. He

hath the right spirit for the hour; the very occasion seems to bring him the grace he needs. His leaf also shall not wither. Because the roots are down in the river, the outermost leaf is green and flourishing. There is abundant life.

And whatsoever he shall do shall prosper. Is it true—true? Well, I am not quite sure that it is always, if you take the words as they stand. I am not quite sure that it is not. But the words, I think, mean this—*whatsoever he doeth he shall prosper.* Winter may come and the blasts of adversity strip the branches, but he shall prosper. The roots shall only get a firmer hold of the rocks.

And then—what then? It is written, "They that dwell in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God." The trees are planted in the plantation until they shall be fit for the park. The flowers bloom in

the hothouse until they are at the best, and then they stand in the hall or deck the table. Here planted, here prospered, here blessed; then by-and-by transplanted to the Paradise of God, beside the river of the water of life.

Is not this a blessed life? Such perfect peace; such sweet serenity. The roots are wrapped about the Rock of Ages, and refreshed by the river of God, which is full of water.

How sharp, how complete, how unending is the contrast! *The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.*

VI

RECEIVE AND GIVE

"Freely ye have received, freely give."—St. Matt. x. 8.

WE must get back to the spring and beginning of these words if we would rightly understand them. Never did any stream lead up to so fair and sweet a fountain. We read in the previous chapter that Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitude He was moved with compassion because they fainted, or, as it is given in the margin with great

pathos, *because they were tired and lay down.* They were as sheep having no shepherd and no pasture, panting, helpless, and hungry. He had compassion on them.

Then He turns to His disciples, for His own relief and for the relief of the people, and saith, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest."

Then comes the break of the chapter as if it were an interval for silent prayer. So we have first a *pitiful Christ*, and then *a prayerful company.* Then comes the next great result—*a powerful ministry.* "And when he had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease." So they are qualified to go and preach, and not to do that only.

The maimed and one-handed Gospel which cares only for men's souls is not the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers, to raise the dead, to cast out devils. "Freely ye have received, freely give."

Now, putting all these together, we have this order laid down—Pity, Prayer, Power, Service. Speak them over to yourselves, and note the order well. As I have said, first there is the pitiful Christ; then there is the prayerful company; and then there stands forth the powerful ministry. But this is not enough. That great yearning compassion must not only stand first, it must run through all as the strength and consecration of each. Pity and Prayer; Pity and Power; Pity and Service; this is the condition of successful labour in the Lord's vineyard.

Pity, this yearning Christlike pity, is the

supreme need of our world; the eager compassion that cannot get away from the thought of the world's wants and sorrows; that dreams of it, and plans and toils for its remedies as other men plan and toil for fame and fortune. How soon should the Church of Christ overtake and win the world if we would but believe it—the deadliest heresy in the world, the steepest down-grade that any Church can ever get on, is to be content with the Christianity that lacks the loving and yearning heart of Jesus Christ. The greatest hindrance to the triumph of the Kingdom of God is that smug Christianity that sings very sweetly of its own little heaven, but is all forgetful of the sheep without a shepherd, that are, alas, so tired, and have often no place to lie down. If any man would enter into heaven, he must set himself to make a heaven for somebody else. "We may be as orthodox as the devil"—do

not be frightened; it is a quotation from the venerable John Wesley—"We may be as orthodox as the devil," but unless our religion do partake of this great deep Divine compassion for men and women, we may be very sure that the religion of Jesus Christ is not ours. There is a test of religion which is the very reversal of the teaching of this book—"I know I am saved, because I feel happy." No, no! Little shall it avail any man to knock at that door: "Lord, Lord, open unto me, because I felt happy." The test of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ is this—*that we live to make other people happy*. The very heart of Jesus Christ must beat within us as our life, sending His love from head to foot—pulsing to the very extremities—or we are dead. This Divine compassion must dwell in us richly, or we have no right to the name of Jesus Christ. The very spring of the disciples' prayer, of

their power, and of their service, was in this compassion for the people. His tender Pity must be the beginning and inspiration of all that we are and all that we do. That must ever be first.

Then comes the next step—*Pity must pass through Prayer into Power.* Prayer, true prayer, has its beginning in pity and its end in service. Prayer without pity is duty cold and hard; the heart and soul are not in it. This yearning entreaty is the very soul of prayer. Prayer without pity may be a trumpeting of one's own goodness, the very essence and climax of Pharisaism; or it may be, and very often is, a daughter of the horseleech, crying "Give, give"—a blind selfishness. But as prayer finds its strength in pity, so pity finds her refuge in prayer. Pity stands looking forth upon the sins and the sorrows of the poor world—the thousands and tens of

thousands of sinful sorrowful men and women and helpless children; and blinded with her tears, she counts up the five loaves and two fishes and sighs over her poverty. What a bewildered helplessness is pity without prayer! But the Master comes with His "Pray ye, pray ye." There is the escape and the endowment of pity. The Master seems to say, "Here is the key of Heaven's resources; for thee the great provision of God is available." Poor Hagar sits making her moan; all her heart yearning over the dying lad; and, lo, her pity passes into prayer. And God Himself doth bend to help her, and an angel straightway opens her eyes and shows her a well of water, and the lad lives. Thus it is that God ever hears the voice of pity, and when the heart yearns with compassion over the multitude, a thousand liveried angels wait upon her, and earth's hidden resources do

reveal themselves for her supply. Go forth amongst the hosts of the world and search for the mightiest thing in it. Ring out the names of the kings and leaders of men; count up earth's wealth; bring forth the armed hosts; yet is this the greatest and first, *a heart of pity that takes hold of God in prayer.* Prayer turns pity into power—this is the sublime meaning of the Gospel. The infinite love of God in the gift of Jesus Christ, the Son of God becoming man and dying upon the cross for us men and for our salvation—is it not the great declaration and assurance that all that God is, and all that God has, and all that God can do, is available to heal the sorrows of our poor world?

Then comes that which completes it all. Thus made mighty by prayer, pity goes forth to service. Pity and prayer can only find their completion in service. Prayer, even

though it be born of pity, yet without service is it a thing unreal, sentimental, almost dishonest. We can only know and enjoy the luxury of prayer when it leads to service. *Pray ye* is always the prelude to *go ye.*

But whilst pity finds its completion in service, *yet let us remember ever that service can only find its strength and beauty in pity.* Our great organisations and efforts to save the world are constantly failing for lack of this divine compassion. Love, tender and gracious love, can always turn the water into wine. But loveless service is apt to reverse the miracle, and turns the wine of God to vinegar and gall. If it is love that makes the world go round, it is certainly love that keeps the rivers full and sweet and clear : without love they are but ditches, stagnant and fœtid. And yet there are people who wonder that a thirsty world does not say thank you for

its cup of ditch water! Pity, great deep yearning pity, alone can keep our service from becoming an offence and a degradation. Charity, dressed as a relieving officer, is apt to have more of the officer than of charity, as if the giving uplifted the one whilst the receiving degraded the other. Christlike love alone can teach us how to touch the wounds of our poor humanity without torturing them. Alas, how often our harsh and clumsy ways of helping do hurt rather than heal. There are, indeed, "precious balms" that do break men's heads and hearts too; fiery balsams that burn instead of soothing. Well has it been said, in words that cannot be repeated too often, that the tale of Divine pity is never believed from lips that are not moved by deep human pity. Pity is power to help, power to heal, power to inspire hope. I would sooner have some people's looks than other people's words,

and some people's words than other people's gifts. Pity is the strong hand of God reached forth to uplift the world. Our poor and passing pity has always in it something of the power and grace of God. Great deep eager compassion alone can fit us for service, and that compassion can only be ours by contact with Jesus Christ and the people, as these disciples learned it of old.

Then comes the summary and application. *Freely ye have received, freely give.* How freely given are all the gifts, and, above all, that unspeakable Gift—more, infinitely more than any had ever dared to ask or think! How freely ours is that gift of the well-beloved Son! and in Him is the pledge of all else that we can need, or that God can give. *Freely ye have received.* Let us count up our mercies and see how rich we are. The gracious quickening of the Holy Ghost;

the forgiveness of our sins, so full, so free, so complete; the tender care and kindly providence of God; the love and blessedness of home; reason and health, and all the blessings of this life. We think of ten thousand ills that might have come upon us, and which we are powerless to avert. Freely we have received.

Freely forgive. To-day, in the strength of God's great love, cast out ill-will and prejudice against any. To be in love and charity with our neighbour is the condition of seeing God. Ill-will within doth shut and lock the door against Him Who comes to sup with us. Freely ye are forgiven, freely forgive.

And freely give. The time has come again when very many of us wish to get a change and holiday in the country. To enjoy it thoroughly you must share it. Do something to help to send those into the country who

without such help could never get there. Think of the men and women to whom a fortnight in some convalescent hospital would be to set them up for the year. There are little sick lads and maidens whose wasted faces and eager eyes could do their own pleading right speedily if we could but set them in our midst. Oh, to get those faces browned with sunshine, and those poor little frames filled with the new life which waits for them in the fresh air of the country! Let each one who is going to have a holiday put something by for those who otherwise have no chance of seeing the beauties of God and earth and heaven. Nor are these all. There are old folks to whom it would be like heaven to get a day or two amidst the stillness and beauty of the country or the sea-side. Those who cannot find other ways of helping can send to the

Sisters of the West London Mission, Lincoln House, Greek Street, Soho, W., marking the donation for the holiday fund. They will be your glad and gracious almoners. It will sweeten your holiday, even if it shorten it a day or two. What it loses in length it shall gain in height and breadth. A richer colour shall rest on earth and sky, a sweeter note shall be in the songs of the birds, and a more delicious fragrance in the flowers, for that you have helped some others to enjoy these fair gifts of God. The pleasures of God are so made that to be fully enjoyed they must be shared. FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE.

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